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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000949

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
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SUBJECT: WHERE IN THE WORLD IS MINNI MINAWI (THE VIEW FROM
DARFUR)

REF: KHARTOUM 932

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. As reported in reftel, the location of Senior Presidential Assistant, SLM leader, and DPA signatory Minni Minawi has been the source of much speculation throughout Sudan over the past week. Other Darfur rebel factions confirm he crossed the border to Chad, where he had meetings in N,djamena before returning to Darfur. Whatever the reality of his movement, and whatever the motivation for it, one thing is clear: the possibility of Minni,s departure from the GNU would be the nail in the coffin for an already moribund Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) and the catalyst for alliances of convenience among armed groups, particularly those of Zaghawa ethnicity, united in their mutual opposition to the GNU. END SUMMARY.

MINNI SPOTTED ENTERING CHAD

¶2. (SBU) Although El Fasher-based representatives of Minni Minawi,s own Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) would not provide a straight answer, two Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) contacts confirmed Minni,s presence in Chad, one citing sources on the border between Tine and Kulbus in West Darfur who had witnessed Minni,s crossing o/a June 19-20 in a convoy of 21 vehicles, and the other affirming on June 24 that Minni had already been in Chad for five days. An SLM rep told FieldOff on June 23 that on June 20 a commander traveling with Minni called from an unknown location to report that Minni was in &the Western town,⁸ which, according to the SLM rep, in the Zaghawa language refers to Chad.

¶3. (SBU) TDRA reps reported that Minni was not in Chad but rather on a &field trip⁸ in Darfur, visiting areas of Abu Gamra, Muzbad and Cornoy, as a sort of needs assessment for his troops and commanders ahead of the rainy season.

¶4. (SBU) An SLM rep later on June 23 told FieldOff that he had confirmed Minni,s whereabouts in the area around Um Barru, West Darfur. The rep said that Minni would soon release a statement to deny rumors of his location and to assure the general public of his continued participation in the GNU. The SLM rep added that Minni would return to Khartoum &soon⁸ but did not specify a fixed timeline. According to the Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the GOS Chief of Military Intelligence in El Fasher confirmed that he had been in contact with Minni, who he reported was in North Darfur and was expected in El Fasher later in the week.

SPECULATION ABOUT MINNI,S DOINGS IN CHAD

¶15. (SBU) SLM reps were uncomfortable discussing Minni,s alleged Chad visit and seemed to be struggling to find excuses for it. One rep speculated that perhaps Minni was summoned to N,djamena after a failed attempt to travel there in January in order to mediate between the Government of Chad (GoC) and the Chadian opposition. This same rep claimed that he knew of many new tanks delivered to Chad, and one JEM rep speculated that Minni was most likely weapon-shopping there. The same JEM rep said that the GoC had in fact spoken with Minni and expected the GoC to ask him to do something to force the GoS to deal with its armed opposition groups.

¶16. (SBU) The JEM contacts said they expected JEM reps in N,djamena to recruit Minni into JEM ranks. &There isn,t any point for him to continue in this hopeless agreement (DPA),⁸ the rep averred. &He should withdraw; withdrawal would be better for him and better for us.⁸ In the face of such a withdrawal, the JEM rep assessed that the GoS would be left with two options: one, devise a &real,⁸ original plan for peace, one not along the lines of the DPA; or two, deal with a &wide war⁸ in which it would be confronted by a unified front of all armed movements.

¶17. (SBU) For the first time in talking with the SLM rep, he did not rule out the possibility of an alliance of convenience between his movement and JEM. Zagawa ties between the two groups evidently trump ideological differences, but the SLM rep even dismissed the ideological divide, citing JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim,s statements on Al Jazeera about JEM,s willingness to deal with Israel as

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indicative of the un-Islamist bent of that movement. &Our ideologies really aren,t so far apart,⁸ the SLM rep admitted.

¶18. (SBU) At the same time, the SLM rep could not predict what would happen for his movement if Minni actually did withdraw from the DPA and go back to the bush. In the immediate term the rep predicted that he would have to leave El Fasher for the bush (likely Dar Es Salaam in North Darfur) but that if there were to be a viable political agenda in the future, &we would need coordination with the SPLM⁸ to make any new regime sustainable.

¶19. (SBU) Residents of El Fasher have taken note of remarks by Chadian President Deby at a pro-government rally in N,djamena, suggesting that only one of the two ruling regimes in Chad and Sudan would remain by the end of the year. Because of Deby,s statements, Minni,s and other prominent Zagawa &defections,⁸ and the Zagawa tendency to unite against their common enemies (in this case the ruling National Congress Party), many citizens expect another attack on Khartoum, possibly precipitated by a tactical strike on a major Darfur city in order to replenish weapons and supplies first.

OPPORTUNE TIME FOR JEM

¶10. (SBU) JEM reps continue to insist that such an offensive is coming to force the GoS to address the issue of Darfur peace. They consider Minni,s presumed &defection⁸ as par for the course in Darfur post-May 10 (JEM,s attack on Omdurman) and bragged (with some accuracy) that JEM was receiving break-away commanders and soldiers not only from SLA/MM but also from other groups like SLA/Unity and SLA/Abdulwahid. These defections had only strengthened JEM, one field commander asserted, obviating the need for JEM to conduct child recruitment, as the GoS was alleging in the press.

¶11. (SBU) Such a repeat attack was necessary &to make the GoS serious about peace,⁸ one JEM political advisor reiterated to FieldOff. JEM still clings to its demands for

one chief UN mediator for peace talks (and still clings to the designation of Kofi Annan for this job), insisting that the current UN and AU mediators &are of an ancient mind⁸ with their ties to flawed history (DPA) and to the GoS framework, and that they accordingly must be replaced. &It,s a waste of our time to talk to Eliasson and Salim,⁸ the JEM political advisor declared, although he agreed to instruct a JEM delegation in London to engage constructively with a Joint Mediation Support Team rep meeting with them on June 25.

Comment

¶12. (C) JEM would obviously be enormously pleased if Minawi decides to abandon his post in the government and return to the field. However it is premature to begin such discussions, as there is still a good chance that Minawi is using the opportunity to pressure Khartoum for DPA implementation. Moreover, though a broad alliance among Zaghawa has been suggested by many, JEM and SLA/Unity still have not managed to reach a suitable arrangement after all this time. For its part, JEM political leadership continues to call for USG involvement in moving the Darfur peace process forward and recommends that the US convene a conference, similar to what Egypt is attempting to do, of parties to the conflict as a first step. JEM observes hopefully that &successful negotiation always begins with clandestine meetings,⁸ and urges help from the USG to bring Sudanese President Bashir and JEM leader Khalil together for preliminary, under-the-radar talks. JEM is dismissive of the degree of difficulty involved with such a move, observing instead that, &Getting Bashir and Khalil to sit down together is no more difficult than waging war,⁸ which makes sense considering that the two were in the same Islamist party until 1999.

FERNANDEZ